



## Dealing with the Vocabulary Difficulties of BSED English Students in Reading Literary Texts

Alexa C. Claro<sup>1\*</sup> , Dion Paolo C. Lamosao<sup>1</sup> , Glaidyn M. Abijay<sup>1</sup> ,  
Aris Pet Angeli A. Suarez<sup>1</sup> , Genesis B. Naparan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saint Columban College, Philippines

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### Abstract

Vocabulary Difficulties are words that BSED English students commonly encounter when reading literary texts, particularly in literature subjects. These difficulties can significantly impede students' comprehension and interpretation of various scholarly works. This study employs the Merriam Case Study Model from 1998 since it aims to provide a contextualized understanding of the vocabulary difficulties faced by BSED English students in reading literary texts. This research employed a triangulation method to collect data from fifteen fourth-year BSED English students, as well as from two peers and two English teachers, using a semi-structured interview guide. The findings highlight the students' perceptions regarding the importance of vocabulary in their reading experiences. Key findings revealed that vocabulary mastery facilitates interpretation, evokes epistemic emotions, and fosters audience engagement. However, students reported several vocabulary difficulties, including encountering unfamiliar words, misusing words, and spelling problems. To address these vocabulary difficulties, BSED English students employed various strategies, such as searching for information, expanding vocabulary through reading, note-taking words, utilizing AI tools, and identifying context clues. Additionally, students expressed intentions or plans to improve their vocabulary by maintaining vocabulary-building notes, reading engagement, participating in English-speaking practices, and immersing in gamification. In conclusion, this study is significant to the body of knowledge and in theoretical and practical methods for both BSED English learners and literature teachers. The study presents several recommendations to enhance teaching and learning strategies within literature courses to better support students in dealing with vocabulary difficulties in literature classes.

**Keywords:** *BSED English Program, Vocabulary Difficulty, Literary Text*

### INTRODUCTION

Reading literary text plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge across diverse subjects. Just like how reading is an essential skill for life, as it lays the foundation for students' achievements, not only in their education but also in various aspects of their lives (Rafael & Tamban, 2022). Therefore, reading proficiency is essential as it improves comprehension and allows for a deeper understanding of complex concepts (Al-Khasawneh, 2019).

Vocabulary is a critical component that exists in written and spoken expressions, particularly in reading. However, reading literature is neither delightful nor beneficial if students have not acquired or possess the necessary vocabulary and literary competence to interpret texts, which is contrary to what an ideal reader should possess (Gazu, 2021). Vocabulary is crucial as it serves as a medium to share expressions and information; therefore, the importance of the appropriate use of vocabulary in texts is tied to literary comprehension. The moment an individual writes a literary piece, they become writers, and they need sufficient vocabulary to write feedback and explain ideas, and, in this context, reading and writing proficiency, along with vocabulary level, are closely interconnected in completing a task (Quines, 2023).

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Corresponding author's email: [alexa.claro@sccpag.edu.ph](mailto:alexa.claro@sccpag.edu.ph)

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In the Philippines, literature in education has consistently been included in the curriculum, as this course serves as a springboard for English classes aimed at enhancing learners' English language skills as a second language. However, the gap in the literature is that teachers find it hard to attract learners to love literature in a genuine way. In this generation, learners prefer to navigate social media and watch videos rather than read literary texts. Findings indicate that many students struggle to understand unfamiliar words and interpret literature effectively. The teachers, as essential facilitators of learning, must enhance their teaching methods and strategies and guide learners to improve their learning experience in reading literature (Benonguil & Barnindo, 2022). Therefore, this study differs from previous research conducted in the Philippines as it aims to aid students in developing and employing strategies to deal with vocabulary difficulties. Additionally, it seeks to raise awareness among teachers, which enables them to improve their teaching styles or methods in literature classes.

In literature, recent research and expert analysis have increasingly focused on vocabulary learning, leading to the development of innovative approaches, techniques, and strategies in vocabulary instruction. Educators are typically concerned with examining texts, narratives, novels, and portions of novels, understanding that these works contain a wealth of new and diverse vocabulary that could impede their students' understanding. In this context, educators should prioritize text analysis and equip their students with resources and strategies to effectively learn vocabulary (Hakem, 2022).

In Schema Theory by Rumelhart (1980), if a reader or learner does not have enough prior knowledge about the topic, contexts, or texts, they will struggle to comprehend the unfamiliar words in the literary texts deeply. This type of situation means that they have a weak schema because, in this framework, readers can only interpret the texts by activating their prior knowledge. The schemata are mental structures that aid learners to interpret information, so in this context, literary comprehension and vocabulary acquisition are active constructions of meaning through pre-existing knowledge.

The participants in this study are fourth-year Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English students. They are selected for their extensive experience and challenges with reading literary texts, specifically related to vocabulary difficulties that affect their comprehension and interpretation of the texts. This study explores the students' perceptions about the importance of vocabulary in reading, the vocabulary difficulties they faced, the strategies they employed, and their plans to improve their vocabulary depth. These findings improve students' learning strategies, vocabulary growth, comprehension, and interpretation skills in reading literary texts, significantly contributing to their academic and future success.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the central question: How do BSED English students describe their vocabulary difficulties in reading literary texts? Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of BSED English students about the importance of vocabulary in reading literary texts?
2. What vocabulary difficulties did the BSED English students encounter in reading literary texts?
3. How do BSED English students deal with vocabulary difficulties when reading literary texts?
4. What are the plans of BSED English students to improve their vocabulary?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reading literary texts offers opportunities for self-discovery and insight, allowing readers to learn about themselves and others daily, as these ideas resonate and evolve in the mind (Hossain,

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2024). Reading literature stirs introspection by enabling readers to reflect on their own identities and decisions that mold them after reading and watching the characters' growth and journey (Altun, 2023).

Vocabulary is a crucial aspect in making context or sense of what we are reading or speaking. Numerous vocabularies from different languages and unique word formations in literary texts can result in an overwhelming array of words and difficulties in understanding them. In connection, vocabulary difficulties pertain to struggles and challenges in understanding and appropriately using words in a context. Learners with limited vocabulary find it challenging to comprehend complex texts, spell and pronounce new words, use words appropriately, identify the grammatical structure of words, and guess contextual meaning, especially when encountering unfamiliar or abstract words, which may weaken their skills in reading and understanding the texts (Kaphle, 2024).

A strong connection exists between vocabulary and reading comprehension, which helps students grasp the text more effortlessly (Corpuz et al., 2024). Conversely, readers of a second language must contend with vocabulary and syntactic structures that are unfamiliar and potentially uncomfortable for them (Gazu, 2021). Therefore, students must develop their English language skills to establish a solid base for comprehending what they read. Importantly, they enhance their language abilities when they possess a sufficient vocabulary (Corpuz et al., 2024).

In addition, in reading English literature, a couple of learning strategies have been integrated, particularly in the classroom. These strategies include active reading, effective note-taking, collaborative learning, using context clues, practicing word usage in a context, textual analysis, multimodal learning, and feedback. Effective learning strategies are a fundamental aspect when studying English literature because, through these strategies, students can enhance their skills, foster deep engagement with literature, and enhance their comprehension and interpretation of literary texts (Yadav, 2024).

Literature is deemed crucial in Indian ESL classrooms because it enhances learners' vocabulary and grammar comprehension, improves reading and writing skills, fosters critical thinking and interpretative skills, and promotes culture awareness and empathy. Understanding and remembering words and grammar is often more effective when they are learned within context. Literature is a venue for students to improve their reading, writing, critical thinking, and interpretative skills. Literature often incorporates creative writing activities that engage students in using their creative ideas and imaginations, involve interpreting meanings or texts, and draw insights into different cultures presented in literary texts (Vaishnav, 2024).

In Schema Theory by Rumelhart (1980), Schemas are structured mental models that assist people in interpreting and retaining new information. When learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts, they enhance their understanding and memory by connecting these to their preexisting knowledge frameworks. Some practical examples mentioned in this theory include activating existing schema, introducing the vocabulary in context, understanding the word deeply by related vocabularies (building schema), and, lastly, applying the word in appropriate contexts.

Several studies have explored literature studies and vocabulary learning instruction. This study focuses on the experiences and challenges of BSED English major students, specifically in reading literary texts. Through this study, we can delve into their perspectives about the importance of vocabulary and the vocabulary difficulties they have experienced in reading numerous literary works throughout their years of studying. We can better understand the strategies they used and their plans to enhance their vocabulary in alignment with their careers as future educators.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was anchored on the Schema Theory of [Rumelhart \(1980\)](#). This theory highlights the role of prior knowledge and mental frameworks, known as schemas, in shaping the process of comprehension and interpretation of an event or situation depicted by the text. Reading and comprehending various literary texts that feature complex or unfamiliar vocabulary is crucial to making learning happen. These cognitive structures help readers make sense of the material by connecting new information to what they already know, enhancing their overall comprehension. Therefore, this framework guides and examines the experiences and challenges of BSED English students in reading literary texts.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate, uncover, and understand the meaning of a phenomenon for those particular groups of individuals involved. The study employed [Merriam's \(1998\)](#) case study approach, which Sharan B. Merriam developed, to conduct an empirical approach. It is a qualitative research methodology that comprehensively describes or investigates a specific phenomenon grounded in real-life contexts and analyzes a bounded system, the case. Applying [Merriam's \(1998\)](#) case study approach, the research allows researchers to understand the vocabulary challenges faced by BSED English students in reading literary texts and to explore effective ways to address these challenges.

### **Research Participants**

The study includes 15 fourth-year participants while carefully observing the criteria and permission of participants, along with two English teachers and two peers as additional sources to further solidify and verify the findings of the study. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method, was used to select participants with specific characteristics for the study. The following criteria set in the study are namely: must be a student enrolled in a higher education private institution during the Academic Year 2024-2025; must be a fourth-year student taking a Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English with performing at or below the academic standard in literature subjects; and they must be willing to participate in the study and unimpeded in sharing their insights about the vocabulary difficulties they experienced with reading English literary texts.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The researchers first consulted experts to revise the interview guide questions. After validating these questions, they obtained formal permission from the dean of the CTEAS department. They then revised the questions based on the panelists' feedback and contacted chosen participants, introduced themselves, and explained the study's significance. Before starting the interviews, they secured permission to record the responses. Using semi-structured interviews, they assured participants they could express themselves liberally. Each interview lasts approximately 15 to 20 minutes, during which other researchers take field notes and document the proceedings.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers analyzed interview transcripts from participants, utilizing Sharan B. Merriam's Case Study methodology. As a result, Merriam's category aggregation divides data into classes or groups to make meaning-finding easier. This approach examines data by detecting trends, themes, and subcategories based on the interview data. Furthermore, they employed the triangulation method to integrate data from peers and teachers, enhancing credibility, reducing

biases, and confirming the results from different lenses. This approach helped identify key patterns and findings relevant to the research questions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study analyzes, extracts significant statements, and interprets the data collected from fifteen fourth-year BSED English students, two peers, and two English teachers. This study was conducted in a private institution located in Pagadian City, Province of Zamboanga del Sur, which offers tertiary education and provides a program for a Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English. Then, the participants were coded using the following initials to protect their privacy and confidentiality. For the fifteen fourth-year participants, researchers utilized the codes FYP1, FYP2, FYP3, FYP4, FYP5, FYP6, FYP7, FYP8, FYP9, FYP10, FYP11, FYP12, FYP13, FYP14, and FYP15. For the two English teacher participants, researchers used ETP1 and ETP2; for the two peer participants, researchers utilized the codes PP1 and PP2.

The categories that emerged in the study are the Importance of Vocabulary in Reading Literary Texts, Students' Vocabulary Difficulties in Reading Literary Texts, Dealing with Vocabulary Difficulties in Reading Literary Texts, and Plans of BSED English Students to Improve Vocabulary.

### **Importance of Vocabulary in Reading Literary Texts**

The perceptions of BSED English students about the importance of vocabulary in reading literary texts present their authentic perspectives on their experiences and challenges in literature classes and their drive for engagement in reading literary works. Based on the participants' responses during the face-to-face interview, these subcategories are *Vocabulary Mastery Facilitates Interpretation, Evokes Epistemic Emotions, and Fosters Audience Engagement*.

#### *Vocabulary Mastery Facilitates Interpretation*

This subcategory defines having an exceptional command of vocabulary as aiding in comprehending and interpreting more profound words and meanings when reading literary texts. Additionally, mastery of vocabulary makes a person's life easier, which, in comparison, can also help them effectively use the words when they are written and communicated. This is evident in the following statements:

*"If you have a wide vocabulary, it is easier to interpret literary works. Since you have a broad selection of words to use, you can understand them better and interpret them more easily."* – FYP1

*"Vocabulary is important so that we can understand what the author is trying to convey or mean, because there are many different interpretations, but only one specific meaning. We should know the meaning of that vocabulary to have a deeper understanding of the story."* – FYP3

*"As an English major, it is very important to have a wide stock of vocabulary because English majors are dealing with different words and meanings when reading literary texts, and sometimes we have to interpret them as well; that is why we have to study those specific words."* – FYP4

*"Some words nowadays are not commonly used — they are new, especially from new writers who also use terminologies that I am not familiar with."* – FYP6.

*"We need to have a wide vocabulary because some writers have a different writing style from our basic writing style. That is why our vocabulary should be broad to understand what we are reading." – FYP10.*

*"Vocabulary is very important because you would not fully understand the story if you did not know the meaning of the words, because the themes and deeper meanings of words in literary texts are not meant to be taken literally." – FYP11.*

*"In our research study, we also interpret figurative language, and there are really some words that we do not understand, so it is confusing to interpret them if we do not know their meanings. That is why it is really important to know a lot of difficult words." – FYP15.*

The importance of vocabulary in reading literary texts allows students to comprehend and interpret deeper meanings behind the literary texts. Vocabulary mastery is deeply associated with reading comprehension, which allows learners to understand the literary text (Corpuz et al., 2024). Even most of the responses following from FYP1, FYP3, FYP4, FYP6, FYP10, FYP11, and FYP15 positively state that if they had a broader vocabulary, it would be easier and much more convenient for them to comprehend and interpret the literary texts and the author's intended meaning, and, most importantly, learn about the whole context of their piece.

It was supported by both English teachers, ETP1 and ETP2, as they mentioned that having a vast vocabulary would make it easier to comprehend and interpret the text you are reading, and add some insightful perspective based on their understanding. Furthermore, the responses of the two peers, PP1 and PP2, correspond with the BSED English participants' statements, as they mentioned that a wide vocabulary is crucial in understanding texts. Most students often struggle with narrative texts, so every student must possess good reading comprehension (Ridwan, 2024).

#### *Evokes Epistemic Emotions*

This subcategory refers to emotions related to knowledge, learning, and thinking, which stimulate the emotions of curiosity, interest, and excitement of the BSED English students about the following event within the literary piece, which follows how we seek and process texts. Due to word difficulties, such as unfamiliar or complex words, learners' reading was hindered, yet these emotions arose. Below are the following statements that correspond to this subcategory:

*"Reading literary texts is very important to me because it helps us gain new words, and makes us realize the meaning behind these words." – FYP2.*

*"It is important to know the specific word to grasp the emotion and understand its meaning. If you read but do not comprehend the words, you will not understand the meaning of the literary text." – FYP4*

*"Vocabulary is important in contexts like poetry because it sounds unique and gives a hint that there might be a deeper meaning. This makes the reader curious, leading them to search for the poem, and if they like it, they will be amazed as they discover its deeper meaning."- FYP5*

*"I realized that some words have new meanings and can be used to express my thoughts. Learning new vocabulary, things, and information is great because I can use them next time and*

*express what I truly mean more clearly.” – FYP9.*

*“If you do not understand the story, it feels like you cannot continue reading smoothly because you must stop and look up the meaning of a word first to stay excited. Some people read without caring about vocabulary and skip to the next chapter, which makes the story less exciting.” – FYP14.*

Based on the responses from FYP2, FYP4, FYP5, FYP9, and FYP 14, reading literary texts can evoke epistemic emotions such as curiosity and excitement when they encounter vocabulary difficulties while reading. This is because they desire to know the meaning behind the texts and the context of the literary piece. Reading texts can prompt emotions, which are fundamental for understanding processes, and reading affects learning (Pekrun, 2022). Therefore, emotions such as curiosity, confusion, and surprise are almost always epistemic because they happen and trigger alongside the learning process, and reading a literary text is a learning process where students can encounter complex words and learn from them (Louick & Emery, 2024).

#### *Fosters Audience Engagement*

This subcategory defines the process of delivering ideas in front of a group of people to convey and communicate the intended deeper meanings and message alongside the theme of the piece. This is evident in the following statements:

*“It is important because when you summarize a paragraph verbally or in writing, others should be able to understand or read your summary smoothly without it being fragmented. They should be able to read it properly and interpret it correctly, and you need to understand it well so they can understand it better.” – FYP7*

*“It is important for it (the literary piece) to be understood because when you present it in front of others, the listeners should be able to understand it. Also, when you express it, it should be in a relevant way because it helps the readers or listeners relate to it.” – FYP8*

FYP 7 and FYP 8 mentioned that summarizing and communicating ideas clearly in front of the audience will enhance their understanding of the message and context behind the literary texts. It will also ignite the audience to feel the emotions behind the literary texts and relate to them. The ability to summarize effectively means you have excellent reading comprehension and writing skills, and the purpose is to give a clearer picture of the original texts (Malaj, 2020).

### **Students’ Vocabulary Difficulties in Reading Literary Texts**

Students in the BSED English program encountered vocabulary difficulties in reading literary works, which resonated with their challenges and affected their self-esteem and confidence in interpreting and conveying ideas. Several subcategories emerged based on the participants’ responses during the face-to-face interview. These subcategories are *Encountering Unfamiliar Words, Misusing Words, and Spelling Problems*.

#### *Encountering Unfamiliar Words*

This refers to those unrecognized and incomprehensible words that BSED English students repeatedly encounter when reading literary texts. This is one of the prevalent vocabulary difficulties that BSED English students commonly face when they read literary pieces. Below are the following statements that correspond to this subcategory:

*"There are words that I am not very familiar with. Whenever I come across unfamiliar words, like when reading, watching movies, or listening to music." – FYP1*

*"It is because the texts themselves contain many unfamiliar terms." – FYP2*

*"When we encounter a literary text, we try to understand its true meaning. You will come across many unfamiliar words, and it is very challenging because there are some words that you cannot understand no matter how hard you try." – FYP3*

*"You should also search more—that is what I do whenever I come across words that seem unfamiliar or ones I have never encountered before." -FYP5*

*"For me, I find it difficult to understand those words, or I still need improvement because I really struggle to understand very deep English." – FYP7.*

*"I lose my confidence because there are some words that I do not fully understand or cannot express completely. It feels disheartening to lose confidence, especially since I am a future teacher." – FYP8*

*"If someone does not have a wide vocabulary, they might struggle to understand, especially when encountering words that seem deep." – FYP10.*

*"It is difficult because it is unfamiliar to you and can disrupt your understanding of the story. So, it is like there is something in the story that you missed because you did not know the meaning of that word." – FYP11.*

*"When I encounter some words that make me pause, it is still new and unfamiliar to me. When I read it, I wonder why they used it and how they used it in their novel." – FYP12.*

*"When reading a story and coming across a word you do not know, you might struggle to understand or adapt to its meaning." - FYP13.*

*"If you are reading and there is a word you do not understand, you would not be able to grasp the whole context of a literary text fully. That is why it is really important to know difficult words—so you can deepen your understanding of the literary piece. Even a single word can be crucial because it helps shape the meaning of the text." – FYP15.*

When reading literary texts, one can frequently encounter unfamiliar words and might wish to check a dictionary for all those terms; however, that will significantly slow one's reading (Winer & Wadell, 2025). The following participants, FYP 1, FYP2, FYP3, FYP5, FYP 7, FYP 8, FYP 10, FYP11, FYP 12, FYP13, and FYP 15, mentioned that they encountered a lot of unfamiliar words, which hindered their understanding of the whole context of the piece because they did not know the meanings of some words and phrases. Their two English teachers, ETP1 and ETP2, supported their responses in literature subjects, and they observed that most BSED English students struggled with unfamiliar words and sometimes skipped paragraphs. Furthermore, it was also supported by their peers; PP1 stated that some words or phrases are unfamiliar and have deep meanings, particularly in English literature pieces like "Pride and Prejudice". This is the same with PP2, who has also



mentioned that some words have deep meanings or words he or she does not know.

#### *Misusing Words*

Students typically acquire new vocabulary while reading literary texts; however, BSED English students often misuse words or make incorrect word choices, which causes misunderstandings of the meanings due to inappropriate use in context. This is evident in the following statements:

*“Sometimes, I catch myself misusing words, which can be frustrating. Like, I know what I want to say, but the word that comes out is not quite right.” -FYP1.*

*“I misinterpret some words, so I feel like I understand them, but it turns out I misunderstood them. Then, you confidently say something to others, only to be corrected because it was not actually right. So sometimes, you have to be careful, and you should make sure that the vocabulary you are using is something you truly understand—like, you already know what that word really means.” – FYP4*

The research participants, FYP1 and FYP4, stated that they often misuse the words, confidently use them, and think they are correct, but they are not actually. One English teacher, ETP2, supported the idea that they sometimes misuse words when formulating sentences, especially when they try to explain a literary piece. Misusing words can be categorized as less suitable words or wrong word choice because if the word being chosen does not convey the intended meaning, it may lead to confusion and misinterpretations of the ideas being delivered, which may show an impression of a lack of attention to detail (Chueasuai, 2025).

#### *Spelling Problems*

One of the subcategories that emerged was spelling problems. Some students in the BSED English program struggle with spelling, particularly with silent letters, writing rules, or phonetic irregularities. Below are the following statements that correspond to this subcategory:

*“I really struggle with spelling every day because there are times when the words have the same spelling but different meanings or contexts.” – FYP8.*

*“It makes it hard for me because some words have spellings that are different from how they are pronounced. Like some words are very long or have many silent letters, such as ‘mnemonic’ and ‘bureaucracy.’ If a word is not used frequently, it becomes harder to spell.” – FYP14*

The researchers highlighted FYP8’s responses, stating that there are exact spellings but different meanings; this can also be called a homograph. Homographs are words that have similar spellings but different meanings or pronunciations. On the other hand, FYP14 stated that if the words are not frequently used, they become more challenging to spell. Two English teachers supported them, as ETP1 and ETP2 mentioned that one of the common difficulties BSED English encountered in their class was that they had difficulty spelling them out. Proper spelling is considered a crucial aspect of written communication, and errors in spelling can alter the meaning and comprehension of text, leading to confusion. Therefore, it is important to use the accurate spelling of words to express the precise intended meaning of the content (Altamimi & Rashid, 2020).

### **Dealing with Vocabulary Difficulties in Reading Literary Texts**

Dealing with vocabulary difficulties is essential when reading literary texts. In this section, BSED English will utilize some strategies to deal with vocabulary difficulties. Based on the participants' responses during the face-to-face interview, several subcategories emerged. These subcategories are *Searching for Information, Expanding Vocabulary through Reading, Note-Taking Words, Utilizing AI Tools, and Identifying Context Clues.*

#### *Searching for Information*

Searching for information involves exploring facts, data, or knowledge to answer a specific question, an unfamiliar term, solve a particular problem, or fulfill a curiosity. Therefore, it involves using different types of sources, such as search engines like Google or consulting a dictionary. Below are the responses that correspond to this category.

*"To solve that kind of problem, I need to read more dictionaries, or you need to read more and more." – FYP2*

*"What I usually do first is go straight to the dictionary, and if the word is not there, I immediately search it on Google to check the definition." – FYP3*

*"When I encounter new words, I really look them up—I search them on Merriam or Google to know what they mean." – FYP4.*

*"Do some research—really take the time to search since we now have free access to the internet. These days, we have so many apps, websites, and other resources that we can use in case there is something we do not understand." – FYP5*

*"I keep a dictionary or cellphone beside me when reading something because I do not continue reading until I understand every word." – FYP6*

*Maybe search on the internet to understand it better, since that is mostly what students do nowadays—when they find something difficult, they immediately search online or check the textbook. – FYP7*

*"If there are words that you really do not understand, you immediately search for them so your brain can process and understand their meaning." – FYP10*

*"You can also just research the meaning of that word." – FYP11.*

*"If I am not familiar with a word, I usually research it." – FYP13.*

The following participants, FYP3, FYP4, FYP5, FYP7, FYP10, FYP11, and FYP13, stated that they searched on the Internet since it is free. It can easily access and know about the words and reach out to Google, apps, or other websites to research them since, in today's generation, the Internet is everywhere, and students are very adaptive to advanced technology. Their response was supported by their peers, PP1 and PP2, who browsed information online or searched for the meaning on Google to fill themselves with new knowledge. Yet, it is important to have self-control and a positive attitude in order to create and foster a productive internet habit (Kuncahyono et al.,

2024).

Furthermore, FYP2, FYP4, FYP6, and FYP10 also state that they immediately consult the dictionary when encountering new words and decode their meaning. One English teacher, ETP2, supported the participants' responses by encouraging them to use a dictionary when encountering unfamiliar words. Furthermore, their peers, PP1 and PP2, also consulted dictionaries to find the synonyms and know the word's overall meaning. When students face vocabulary challenges, some consult the dictionary to confirm or decode the meaning of words to understand the text's overall meaning (Dardjito et al., 2023).

#### *Expanding Vocabulary through Reading*

This strategy is one of the common ways that BSED English students use when they want to immerse themselves in exposure to new words. If they repeatedly encounter those words, they find themselves knowing the word's definition and usage. Through this, they can acquire and expand their vocabulary since reading literary pieces can expose them to so many words to learn. This is evident in the following statements:

*"I try to engage myself in reading because they say that the more you read, the more knowledge you gain. I have also tested it myself, and it is true, but reading is something I find boring." -FYP6*

*"I engage myself because I am also a fan of reading health books. I like it because, even though the words are basic, it still unlocks new knowledge, and you get to figure out something new." - FYP9.*

*"I will try to read more English novels or stories so that I can deepen my vocabulary." - FYP15.*

As FYP6, FYP9, and FYP15 mentioned, they deeply engage with reading books, like different types of books, to gain more knowledge and unlock new words. However, as FYP6 mentioned, sometimes they find themselves getting bored with reading. Another important aspect to consider when choosing literary texts is whether a specific work can stimulate the learners' curiosity and elicit strong and positive responses from them (Mussa & Fente, 2020). Therefore, there are probably some pieces that students find hard to take an interest in. An English teacher also supported the participants' responses; ETP 1 encouraged students to read and have interactive discussions about the piece. Furthermore, their peers supported their response; PP1 and PP2 mentioned that further reading absorbs the words and gradually acquires them.

#### *Note-Taking Words*

This is a practical strategy that students usually use when they encounter new or unfamiliar words while reading literary texts. Note-taking words include taking notes of new words while adding information about those words. Note-taking words is the best way to track and review words so that students can learn and utilize those words effectively. This is evident in the following statements:

*"By, you know, taking notes and reading them over and over. It is effective because it is like rehearsing a song." – FYP2.*

*"I have a set of vocabulary where I take note of the words I encounter so that when the time comes for me to use them, I already know that this is the right vocabulary." – FYP3*

*"There are times when I note down certain words and then look for their meaning." – FYP14.*

FYP2 stated that reviewing and rereading the notes multiple times effectively equips the words; it is like rehearsing a song. Furthermore, FYP3 and FYP14 mentioned that whenever certain words appeared, they would immediately take note of them, look for the meaning, and use the word appropriately. Therefore, taking notes effectively helps to organize and retain information (Yadav, 2024).

#### *Utilizing AI Tools*

This refers to Artificial Intelligence apps that students popularly use nowadays because they are free and easily accessible worldwide. In dealing with vocabulary difficulties in reading literary texts, BSED English students utilise AI tools to ask for definitions and examples of the difficult vocabulary that they encounter. Below are the responses that correspond to this subcategory:

*"Especially now that AI is available, it is easier to ask for examples of different vocabulary. You no longer need to read a book or dictionary because it quickly provides information." – FYP1*

*"Sometimes, I use ChatGPT to explain it to me in Bisaya so I can understand it better. That is the first thing I do to avoid embarrassment." – FYP8*

AI tools provide clear definitions and examples that are more comprehensible and easier to understand. FYP1 stated that using AI tools makes asking for examples of different vocabulary words much easier without reading books or dictionaries. FYP8 also mentioned that utilizing ChatGPT, asking for examples, and translating them to Bisaya would help them understand the words. One peer participant, PP1, supported their responses, stating that sometimes utilizing AI tools simplifies concepts. Nonetheless, even with the advancement in technology, the crucial role of teachers in the classroom has not lessened (Orhani, 2023).

#### *Identifying Context Clues*

Context Clues are essential hints to identify the given meaning behind the unfamiliar words. Context Clues can come in any form; they could be synonyms, antonyms, explanations, or ideas. This is evident in the following statement below:

*"The familiar words before the unfamiliar word can help you understand it. For example, the familiar words can serve as clues." – FYP11.*

FYP11 stated that those familiar words before the unfamiliar words should be the basis or a hint to identify what the unfamiliar word means. This is why context clues are helpful when reading literary pieces. Their English teacher, ETP2, even supported the idea that context clues can actually help when dealing with vocabulary difficulties like unfamiliar words. These hints may appear in the same sentence as the vocabulary word or in a different part of the passage, so pay attention whenever a new term is introduced. Context clues can assist students in identifying the main idea of a text or in making inferences about the meanings of unfamiliar words. Additionally, context clues enhance students' vocabulary skills and boost their motivation during the learning process (Norhayati & Elmayantie, 2022).

### **Plans of BSED English Students to Improve Vocabulary**

BSED English students' plans to improve vocabulary have something to do with their future goals and careers as fourth-year BSED English students. However, improving vocabulary can also significantly impact each student's personal life. Several subcategories emerged based on the participants' responses during the face-to-face interview. These subcategories are *Reading Engagement*, *Vocabulary-Building Notes*, *English-Speaking Practices*, and *Immersing in Gamification*.

#### *Reading Engagement*

Reading is the most important element in acquiring knowledge. When they engage in reading, they will explore beyond the texts because they will come across deep terminologies. The following statements correspond to this subcategory.

*"I think my plan is to read more books, which means I can read a lot of literary pieces to gain more knowledge and confidence."* – FYP2.

*"I plan to read more books, especially those in American literature or something like Afro-Asian literature."* – FYP4.

*"Always read the dictionary when you come across difficult terminology. You should not just ignore them without understanding because you might need them in the future, and you will have new terms to use."* – FYP6.

*"Just read the dictionary—there is a lot you can find there."* – FYP8.

*"Through reading, you can acquire vocabulary. You will learn a lot, and many unfamiliar words will become familiar to you because you are reading."* – FYP11.

*"The number one plan is to encounter unfamiliar words through reading novels. However, I recommend that if you want to improve your vocabulary, you should read."* – FYP12.

*"Read dictionaries and search, but you will not totally memorize everything—just enough to familiarize yourself with it."* – FYP13

*"I tried reading a book, marked the unfamiliar words, then searched for them. After that, I went back to reading again"* – FYP14.

As stated by FYP2, FYP4, FYP12, and FYP14, they plan to read more books to gain more knowledge and new vocabulary due to different authors' writing styles. Furthermore, FYP6, FYP8, and FYP13 mentioned that they plan to read the dictionary because there is a list of words they will encounter. Lastly, FYP11 stated that they can acquire vocabulary through reading, and those unfamiliar words will become familiar due to deep reading. Their responses were supported by two English teachers, ETP1 and ETP2, stating that their method to help students improve their vocabulary is to let them read more and more, or practice with individual reading without external pressure, but it is something within themselves. Moreover, two peer participants, PP1 and PP2, corresponded to the participants' responses that they planned to read, especially more novels. Reading comprehension is an essential ability in literature that entails grasping and interpreting written works. It includes the capacity to understand explicit information, make inferences, analyze the author's purpose, and relate to previous knowledge and experiences (Corpus et al., 2024).

### *Vocabulary-Building Notes*

Most BSED English students' plan to improve their vocabulary has something to do with note-taking words daily, especially those complex and unfamiliar words. In vocabulary-building notes, they can review them anytime and utilize those words in conversation. Below are the responses that correspond to this category.

*"Every day, I make sure to encounter at least one word that I do not know the meaning of, then I write it down in my notes." – FYP3.*

*"Write down unfamiliar words in your notes so you can review them when you have time or a free period. Sometimes, we use them because we have become confident since we are already familiar with them. However, make sure to avoid using words carelessly." -FYP12*

*I searched for this because I am trying to find at least 10 words a day. If I come across a difficult word, I list it down and write its meaning. Then, as much as possible, I try to use it when communicating," – FYP15.*

As FYP3 mentioned, he or she must encounter words that they do not know about and note them. FYP12 additionally stated that they should write unfamiliar words in the notes and review them during the vacant time. Lastly, FYP15 shared that he should list 10 words daily in his or her notes, put definitions, and use them in communication carefully and adequately. The purpose of taking notes is to build up their vocabulary and fully acquire the words.

### *English-Speaking Practices*

This type of plan is unique and highly helpful for BSED English students since English-speaking practices are one way to improve their fluency in speaking skills, particularly in the English language. Furthermore, it will help polish their grammar and pronunciation, especially when they can practice utilizing various vocabulary. This is evident in the following statements below:

*"Maybe communicating with other people, especially those fluent in English, will help me understand the meaning right away. That means there is progress in my vocabulary." – FYP3*

*"We are currently practicing speaking English in our boarding house by conversing with each other. We have something called the 'EO' (English Only) rule in our boarding house to practice." – FYP5*

*"Then practice speaking more. I will ask my friends for help and inquire if I have improved." – FYP7*

FYP3 mentioned that communicating with fluent people can help them enhance their vocabulary and see progress. FYP5 also mentioned that they set a rule in their boarding house to speak only English to practice. Furthermore, FYP7 stated that he or she should practice speaking and seeking feedback from peers if he or she improves. Students' development in the English language is evaluated based on their speaking abilities because having a strong grasp of the language, which includes grammar, vocabulary, effective discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication, is crucial for improving learners' speaking skills (Caratiquit et al.,

2022).

### *Immersing in Gamification*

Gamification is a game-like platform or application that can be used for engagement and learning. The types of gamification that can improve vocabulary include word puzzle games like Bookworm and Wordscapes, word quests or challenges, scavenger hunts, crossword puzzles, etc. Gamification is an engaging way for learners to learn. This is evident in the following statements:

*“Gamification involves creating games—these are games that facilitate learning through play. There are many games focused on vocabulary that can test your vocabulary skills. One game I have personally tested is Bookworm; when you play Bookworm, you can create words that you have read before.” – FYP12.*

Gamification is a game where students can learn anything through a game. It is now somehow the support of students when they face vocabulary difficulties. Through playing, students learned and became curious about the words they encountered. Gamification in education is immensely beneficial for motivating students since gamification has elements such as challenges, points, levels, feedback, and rewards that have a powerful effect on students engaging in the game (Saleem et al., 2022). Students have a favorable attitude toward integrating gamification in the educational process because it motivates them to learn (Cuenca-Calva et al., 2024).

Based on the overall responses of all the findings or themes that emerged, the participants acknowledged the importance of vocabulary as it is the essence when we read literary texts; through vocabulary, we can interpret texts, express emotions, and engage with others. It clearly shows that some of their responses were mixed with frustrations among the majority of the participants when they encountered these vocabulary difficulties, which made some of them lose confidence and engagement in reading further literary texts. It is important to consider struggles in reading literature while still continuing to enhance their vocabulary, looking up for their plans, and continuing to utilize the strategies they have effectively considered during reading literary works.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The research participants described their vocabulary difficulties in reading literary texts as significantly challenging but a meaningful and learnable experience. They positively recognize the importance of vocabulary in reading literary texts, as it helps them comprehend and interpret the text they read, evoke epistemic emotions, and they could engage the audience through effective summarization and delivery of the texts. However, they experienced vocabulary difficulties in reading literary works, such as encountering unfamiliar words, misusing words, and spelling problems. These difficulties may be a huge barrier for them, but they can be dealt with by searching for information, expanding their vocabulary through reading, note-taking, utilizing AI tools, and identifying context clues. That is why they mentioned that their plans to improve their vocabulary were to engage in reading deeply, take vocabulary-building notes, encourage English-speaking exercises, and immerse themselves in educational gamification. The findings contribute significantly to the theory of Rumelhart since his theory can be expanded and utilized for various vocabulary research studies, especially in the literature.

Furthermore, to improve the learning and teaching experience in literature classes, the teacher should incorporate active learning strategies like think-pair-share, think-aloud, integrate pre-reading activities, during reading, and post-reading, or integrate the practical application of schema theory during reading a story in literature classes. For curriculum developers, if they focus on literature courses, they should design schema-activation prompts in textbooks just like pre-

reading activities in an engaging way and introduce various words coming from various literary pieces with meaningful contexts and related synonyms, which teachers could use for a brief assessment before heading to the next topic.

### LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

After analyzing the study's findings, several limitations emerged. It primarily focuses on fourth-year BSED English students, with a limited number of participants due to specific criteria, making it context-specific and not generalizable to broader populations. However, this does not diminish the practical relevance of the findings, since the study is based on participants' real experiences, which were collected through a rigorous data collection process. Future researchers could focus on objective measures, such as a quantitative study approach, to assess the vocabulary breadth and depth of BSED English students across different year levels or between first-year and second-year students within the BSED English program. This could enhance understanding, inform interventions, and improve teaching methods in education.

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